

THE VISN 5 MIRECC UPDATE

An Electronic Publication of the VA Capitol Healthcare Network (VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center

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A Note from the Editor:

This is the first edition of The VISN 5 MIRECC UPDATE. The UPDATE will be released once every two months and will include information about research, clinical and educational programs related to the MIRECC in VISN5 (VA MARYland Healthcare System, Washington D.C. VAMC, & Martinsburg, West Virginia (VAMC)). The UPDATE will feature columns written by members of the the MIRECC team including clinical staff, researchers, educators, and administrators. We will use the UPDATE to keep you informed about new projects, new personnel, upcoming events, and research advances that are related to improving the quality of care for veterans with schizophrenia. The next issue of the VISN 5 MIRECC UPDATE will be published Friday , July 21, 2000. Deadline for submission of items to the July UPDATE is Friday, July 7, 2000. Items may be emailed to Richard Goldberg, Ph.D., the UPDATE editor and Assistant Director of the VISN 5 MIRECC Education Core at Richard.Goldberg@med.va.gov. Dr. Goldberg can also be reached by telephone at (410)605-7457 or (410) 706-2490.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Alan S. Bellack, Ph.D. ABPP, Director, VISN 5 MIRECC

Welcome to the first issue of our electronic newsletter. As our first public dissemination endeavor, it represents a milestone in our development. I look forward to being able to use this column to share information and ideas about the MIRECC. We have been busy recruiting staff, investigators, and trainees since our funding began in October, 1999, and are now up and running in a number of areas. Our office suite on the sixth floor of the Baltimore campus of VAMHCS is under construction (I had to dust my keyboard off before writing this column) and we hope to have a Grand Opening some time in June. We have already introduced ourselves and described our Center at Grand Rounds in Baltimore, and have scheduled similar presentations for Perry Point, Washington, and Martinsburg over the next few months. Please feel free to contact me at those presentations or by e-mail if you have any questions or comments about the MIRECC or MIRECC programs. My telephone number and email address are listed below.

A little information about our MIRECC

The following sections from our application provide a brief overview of our Mission, Structure, and Focus.

Mission

The purpose of the Capitol Network (VISN 5) MIRECC is to develop a center for research, training, and service for veterans with schizophrenia and their families. Our work, particularly in regard to substance abuse, women, and mental health service systems and health care economics, extends to veterans with

other severe and persistent mental illnesses (SPMI) as well. The center is based at the Baltimore Division of the Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS), and involves substantial integration with the scientific expertise on schizophrenia and mental health services at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health. Active research, educational and clinical program links are maintained across VISN 5 facilities including, the Perry Point Division of the VAMHCS, the Martinsburg, West Virginia VAMC and the Washington D.C. VAMC.

The VISN 5 MIRECC represents an integrated, multilevel program that extends from development and testing of new antipsychotic medications, through psychosocial treatment and rehabilitation, and mental health services research. New findings will be disseminated through comprehensive education programs for VISN staff, veterans, their families, and other VAMCs. Clinical demonstration programs will be established to test new strategies and to serve as models for dissemination. Consistent with the overall mission of the VISN 5 MIRECC to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of services for veterans with schizophrenia and their families, the MIRECC Research Program will emphasize research that promotes the translation of research findings into evidence-based practice.

Structure

The VISN 5 MIRECC is organized around Cores that provide expertise and services that support programs and projects. The structure includes: 1) an Administrative Core that oversees the MIRECC and insures that the mission is achieved; 2) a Research Core that includes (i.) a Biostatistics Core, that will provide statistical and data management expertise, (ii.) an Assessment Core, to coordinate application of a standardized assessment battery and provide training for project assessment staff; and (iii.) a set of Research Projects; and 3) Education and 4) Clinical Cores that insure dissemination and clinical application of MIRECC findings and developments.

The VISN 5 MIRECC will support and facilitate research, educational programs, and clinical demonstration projects in the key areas of scientific interest, including: substance abuse, psychopharmacology, neurocognitive factors in rehabilitation, health behaviors, women with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses, and service delivery systems. Given the breadth of expertise on schizophrenia in our system, we will also support projects on other topics that are consistent with our mission, including work with families of veterans with schizophrenia and on homelessness.

Focus

The ultimate goal of our MIRECC is to improve the care of all veterans with schizophrenia within VISN 5, and by extrapolation, within the entire VA system. While our primary focus is on schizophrenia, our work will have considerable applicability for veterans with other serious and persistent mental illnesses as well. Our decision to focus on schizophrenia is based on the fact that veterans with this illness have a unique pattern of deficits and special needs that are not addressed in many programs designed for the broader population of mentally ill veterans. Conversely, chronicity and severity of illness are important common factors that permit information gleaned in research and clinical programs for people with schizophrenia to be applied to other seriously mentally ill veterans.

While veterans living with schizophrenia have multiple problems, we have elected to target six areas that are especially relevant to veterans and the VA, and on which we can bring considerable research and clinical expertise to bear. Each of these areas will be the subject of research, educational activities, and enhanced clinical services. Our activities will encompass development and evaluation of new interventions in these domains, and evaluation of their costs and impact on systems of care. The six focus areas are: 1) Substance Abuse; 2) Psychopharmacology; 3) Neurocognitive Factors and Rehabilitation; 4) Health Behaviors; 5) Women with Schizophrenia; and 6) Service Delivery Systems.

For more information about the VISN 5 and other MIRECCs across the country we invite you to visit the VISN 22 sponsored web page at www.mirecc.org.

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Current Projects

1. Improving Health Services for Veterans with Schizophrenia

Drs. Alan S. Bellack and Anthony Lehman were recently awarded an HSR&D Grant to advance efforts to enhance the quality of care (QOC) for veterans with schizophrenia by implementing newly available QOC assessment methodologies for schizophrenia. For more details about this project, please contact either Dr. Bellack (410) 605-7383 or Dr. Lehman (410) 706-2490.

2. Family Members of Veterans with Serious Mental Illness.

The VISN 5 MIRECC includes two new projects addressing the needs of family members and other caregivers of veterans with serious mental illness. The first is a family needs assessment which includes efforts to learn from VA staff, veterans receiving mental health services and their family members about family-member needs and preferences within the VISN mental health programs. The second program, The NAMI Family to Family Education Program (FFEP) is an acclaimed education program for family members of adults with serious mental illnesses. Currently used in communities across 40 states, this program includes a structured curriculum implemented by trained family-member teachers. We are very excited about bringing this program into the VISN. For more information, contact Dr. Alicia Lucksted at (410) 328-5389.

3. Feasibility of Using the Medi-Monitortm System in the Treatment of Outpatient Schizophrenia

This project will help determine the feasibility of using the Medi-Monitortm system for compliance monitoring, symptom monitoring, and patient education in patients with schizophrenia. The Medi-Monitortm device consists of a small box, 4^{3/4} inches by 9 inches by 1^{1/2} inches. It has 5 compartments for medication storage, a screen for displaying educational messages, and buttons which patients or caregivers can push in answer to questions about current symptoms. Information entered into the Medi-Monitortm is easily downloaded by connecting the unit to a cradle connected to a regular telephone line. For more details on the implementation of this feasibility study, contact Dr. Paul Ruskin at (410) 605-7354.

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New Members of the MIRECC Team

Darin Lerner, MD: In conjunction with Steve Deutsch, M.D., Ph.D., Director, Mental Health Service Line, VISN 5 and Christine LaGana, Ph.D., Facility Service Line Manager, Mental Health, VAMHCS, we have recruited Darin Lerner, MD to direct a new inpatient unit at the Perry Point VAMC. The unit will be part of VISN 5 efforts to develop an integrative system of care for veterans with schizophrenia who have failed to respond to traditional treatments and/or have been long term residents of inpatient facilities. A recent NIMH Post-doctoral Fellow, Dr. Lerner will direct the new inpatient unit at Perry Point.

Mary Lupi, a long-time VA employee, came on board as our administrative officer on April 10, 2000. Ms. Lupi will work closely with the MIRECC Director in the areas of administration / management, program development, resource management, program evaluation, and public relations for the MIRECC. She will be managing the operational and developmental aspects of the research, educational, and clinical care programs of the MIRECC. Establishing and maintaining communication with administrative and patient

care services within the VA Capitol Network, the VA Central Office, and with the professional schools of the University of Maryland will be another important aspect of her work with the MIRECC.

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Upcoming Events

1. Grand Rounds Presentations. For more information contact Mary Lupi, VISN 5 MIRECC Administrative Officer at (410) 605-7456.

May 31, 2000. Grand Rounds Presentation at the Perry Point VAMC: An Introduction and Overview of the VISN 5 MIRECC

June 8, 2000. Grand Rounds Presentation at the Martinsburg, West Virginia VAMC: An Introduction and Overview of the VISN 5 MIRECC.

(TBA). Grand Rounds Presentation at the Washington, D.C. VAMC: An Introduction and Overview of the VISN 5 MIRECC.

2. Lectures presented by the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center (MPRC) Contact Stephanie Feldman at 410 402-6885 (Sfeldman@mprc.umaryland.edu) for more information about these lectures.

June 2, 2000. Medical Comorbidity in Schizophrenia. Presenter: Dr. Lisa Dixon, M.D., M.P.H. Associate Professor, University of Maryland, Baltimore and MIRECC Investigator. Location: Springfield Hospital Center, Springfield, MD.

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